

**Testimony in Opposition to Governor's Bill No. 6363 – An Act
Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning
General Government, Conservation, Development, Regulation,
Protection, Judicial and Corrections**

Committee on Appropriations

**Matthew W. Hart
Town Manager, Town of Mansfield**

I write today in opposition to Section 5 of Governor's Bill No. 6363, which would increase the reimbursement rate that towns would pay under the resident trooper program. As proposed, Section 5 of this bill would increase the reimbursement rate from 70% to 85% effective July 1, 2009, and to 100% effective July 1, 2010.

There are three main points that I wish to touch upon here. The first concerns the financial impact of the proposal to increase the reimbursement rate. For decades, the Town of Mansfield has enjoyed the services of the resident trooper program. Our proposed budget for FY 2009/10 includes \$806,000 for resident troopers. Under our calculation, at the 70% reimbursement rate this amount would be sufficient to fund eight troopers and one sergeant. The town's current contingent consists of seven troopers and one sergeant, and we were hoping to add an eighth trooper for the upcoming fiscal year. If this proposal is ultimately approved by the General Assembly, Mansfield will not be in a position to fund the additional trooper.

I realize that the state is under considerable financial duress, and needs to increase revenues and reduce expenditures where possible. Connecticut's town and cities, however, are in a similar situation, and increasing the reimbursement rate will transfer unto local property taxpayers an even greater share of the burden to fund the resident trooper program. The proposal to increase the reimbursement rate for next year is particularly onerous in that the Governor's proposed budget contemplates a sizable reduction in two non-education statutory grants to Mansfield – the payment in lieu of taxes (-\$754,000) and town aid for roads (-\$55,000). Overall, for general fund purposes Mansfield is facing a revenue shortfall of \$1.2 million, which is significant based on a \$44 million spending plan. Consequently, the proposed increase for the resident trooper program is acutely painful on top of the sizable reduction to the PILOT and TAR grants.

Second, the proposed increase in the reimbursement rate flies in the face of the state's efforts to promote regionalism. In my view, along with regional school districts, regional health districts and councils of government, the resident state trooper program provides one of the most successful examples we have in Connecticut of sharing services on a regional basis and between different levels of government. At this point, regionalism is somewhat limited in our state – if we do indeed desire to promote and advance regionalism, we need to provide financial and other incentives to encourage municipalities to partner with each other and with different levels of government,

including the state. Increasing the reimbursement rate for the state trooper program runs counter to this effort.

As a third and final point, I am not convinced that increasing the reimbursement rate for the resident trooper program will provide significant savings for the state and could lead to a diminution of service at the local level. I would imagine that any cost savings projection is premised on the assumption that towns will retain their current contingent of resident troopers. In practice, however, I fear that that this will not be the case and towns with more than one trooper will move to reduce staffing levels. Under this scenario, resident troopers will return to their assigned troops and the state will lose the reimbursement that is had previously received. And, with a statutory minimum number of troopers, I believe it is unlikely that the state would lay off sworn personnel to recoup the projected savings. Furthermore, towns that do reduce staffing levels will see a diminution of service at the local level, which is not desirable from either the state or the municipality's perspective.

For the reasons stated above, I encourage the committee to oppose the recommendation to increase the reimbursement rate that towns would pay the state under the resident trooper program. I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this proposal.

CC: Mansfield Town Council
State Senator Donald Williams
State Representative Denise Merrill
Windham Region Council of Governments